

Title Increasing Earnings of Social Security Disability Income Beneficiaries with Serious Mental Disorder

Authors Salkever, D. S., Gibbons, B., Drake, R. E., Frey, W. D., Hale, T. W., & Karakus, M.

Year 2014

Target Population People with severe and persistent mental disorders (SPMD)

Key Words SPMD, supported employment, employment, Social Security Administration

Brief Description Combining provision of individual placement and supported employment, systematic medication management, and other behavioral health services has shown to be effective in increasing earnings of individuals with severe and persistent mental disorders.

Article Summary

This study shows that an intervention of behavioral health services can slightly increase earnings of individuals with SPMD and that these increases may continue over time.

The study, published in *The Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics*, aimed to evaluate the impact on earnings of the Mental Health Treatment Study (MHTS) in individuals with SPMD in an intervention group, as compared to a control group. Participants had diagnoses of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or depression, and received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Twenty-three sites that spanned four U.S. Census regions participated in the study. The Mental Health Treatment Study provided participants in the experimental group ($n = 1004$) with individual placement and support; supported employment; systematic medication management; and other behavioral health services. The MHTS also reduced financial barriers by providing medical insurance for those who lacked coverage, paying premiums for drug coverage, and funding non-covered health care costs. Participants in the control group ($n = 1051$) received services as usual, as well as compensation for completing surveys.

Salkever and colleagues demonstrated that, compared to participants receiving services as usual, participants in the intervention group showed small but steady increases in earnings. Participants in the intervention group made anywhere from \$791 to \$1,131 more annually than those in the control group. Data on monthly income over the course of the study also show that intervention group participants increased earnings at each follow-up interview over a period of two years after baseline. It is important to note that the increases in earnings may have been relatively small due to concerns about loss of SSDI benefits for these participants or because participants had been on SSDI for an average of nine years. This might indicate a lack of job history and training that would result in lower paying jobs.

The results of this study carry an important implication. Provision of services such as supported employment, systematic medication management, and behavioral health services that continue after individuals with severe mental health diagnoses become employed may assist in maintaining employment and increasing earnings over time. The authors note that future studies should address reducing policy barriers to employment for persons with SPMD and should measure the impact for follow-up periods greater than two years.